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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 000254

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KN](#) [CH](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: CHINESE ACADEMICS COMMENT ON KOREAN PENINSULA  
ISSUES, PREDICT DPRK PROVOCATION

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.  
4 (b/d).

Summary  
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1. (C) In conversations with PolOff preceding recent international media reports of increasingly fiery DPRK rhetoric, Chinese scholars predicted that North Korea would seek to manufacture a crisis in order to gain the attention of the new U.S. administration. In view of the disappointing conclusion to the December Six-Party Talks meeting, one academic suggested, it might be time to have a "new discussion" on how to achieve stability on the Korean Peninsula. In view of concerns that a reunified Korean Peninsula would mean the loss of a buffer zone between U.S. troops and the Chinese border, one scholar suggested joint Sino-U.S. military exchanges could ease Chinese concerns about U.S. military objectives in the region. Positive Sino-DPRK ties, a contact alleged, help China maintain stability on its border and increase its influence over the future of the Korean Peninsula. One academic maintained there is "insufficient consensus" among the Chinese elite on how to manage the issue of North Korea, but concluded that PRC policy has become more strategic and less reactive in recent years. End Summary.

DPRK Could Provoke Crisis Soon  
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2. (C) In conversations with PolOff that preceded recent international media reports of increasingly hostile DPRK rhetoric (directed particularly at South Korea) and a possible missile test, two Chinese academics predicted that North Korea would issue provocative statements or seek to manufacture a crisis in order to gain the attention of the new U.S. Administration. Beijing University International Relations Professor Zha Daojiong half-joked to PolOff that the DPRK might "engineer another hibernation of its leader" and advised the United States not to "take the bait." The State Council's Institute of World Development (IWD) Secretary General Bian Xiaochun told us that North Korea understood that it is not the "number one foreign policy issue" in the world and believes that it "only has leverage when there is a crisis." The Six Parties needed to enhance coordination and "act carefully" when dealing with North Korea. "If you treat North Korea as a nuclear power, then it behaves as a nuclear power," said Bian. She suggested focusing on helping North Korea become a more "normal" country with a self-sufficient economy.

Recommending a New Approach to the DPRK  
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3. (C) While praising the Six-Party Talks as having been

"useful," Professor Zha said the disappointing conclusion of the Six-Party Talks Heads of Delegation meeting in December raised the question of the Talks' continued efficacy and purpose. While North Korea's nuclear weapons program was an "irritant," it was ultimately a "low-risk threat," Zha assessed. The Six-Party Talks helped promote a sense of confidence and cooperation in resolving the nuclear issue, but did not help contain North Korea, said Zha.

¶4. (C) IWD Secretary General Bian expressed similar frustration regarding the December Six-Party Talks meeting, saying that North Korea "led us by the nose." Bian wondered whether it might be time to have a "new discussion" on how best to achieve stability on the Korean Peninsula. Bian went further than our other contacts, even suggesting that Chinese and U.S. officials ask the fundamental question, "Could the United States and China live with the reality of a nuclear North Korea?" Bian said she believed that "China could accept a new approach to the DPRK nuclear issue "if the United States could." She was adamant, however, that North Korea would have to adopt a "no first use" nuclear policy as a precondition to a new approach. She also suggested that China and the United States discuss creating a mechanism to control the movement of nuclear materials and equipment to the DPRK.

#### Easing Concerns about Loss of a Buffer State

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¶5. (C) Given the common Chinese view that North Korea acts as a buffer between the Chinese border and U.S. troops based in

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South Korea, Zha suggested that China and the United States hold joint military exchanges, conduct joint search and rescue exercises and establish a more permanent military-to-military relationship to address Chinese concerns about U.S. military objectives in the region. Such cooperation could signal to North Koreans and "hard-liners in China" that China "can work with the Americans," said Zha.

#### The Importance of Sino-DPRK Ties

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¶6. (C) China was careful to maintain a positive relationship with the DPRK, according to Renmin University Professor Shi Yinhong. China was concerned that an economic collapse in North Korea might lead to a refugee and security crisis on China's border. Although China from time to time condemned its neighbor for "bad" behavior, noted Shi, it would continue to provide oil and humanitarian assistance in order to maintain stability in China's northeast. Also, China was laying a foundation for its future role in the region, said Shi. Positive Sino-DPRK ties would help China steadily increase its influence over the future of the Korean Peninsula. "Sooner or later, China will be the greatest external power over the Korean Peninsula," asserted Shi.

#### A More Strategic Approach

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¶7. (C) Separately, Professor Zha speculated to PolOff that there was "insufficient consensus" among the Chinese elite on how to manage the issue of North Korea. He believed that Chinese leaders had been frustrated with a reactive North Korea policy formulated by a group of advisors narrowly focused on Korean issues. However, since 2006, when Liu Xiaoming was appointed the PRC Ambassador to Pyongyang, China's policy toward North Korea had steadily moved toward a more strategic approach, according to Zha. Previous Ambassadors to Pyongyang spoke Korean and were experts on Korean Peninsula issues, but the appointment of Liu, an expert on the United States and a fluent English speaker, indicated a change in policy, he said.

Comment

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18. (C) The interlocutors cited above are all mainstream DPRK watchers in Chinese academia, but we have no information to suggest they are privy to the innermost discussions among Chinese officials working directly on the North Korea nuclear issue. Like almost all of our contacts, they praise the U.S.-China collaboration demonstrated in the Six-Party Talks but share a frustration with DPRK unwillingness to move forward in the Talks. We have heard nothing from our MFA counterparts to suggest they would agree with Bian that we explore accepting the DPRK as a nuclear state.  
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